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SUBJECT: OIC OFFICIALS, ADDRESSING REGIONAL ISSUES, CALL
FOR STRENGTHENED US TIES AND HIGH LEVEL ATTENTION

REF: A. JEDDAH 0044

[B](#). JEDDAH 0051

[C](#). JEDDAH 0121

Classified By: CG Martin R. Quinn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: At an Organization of the Islamic Conference(OIC) roundtable with visiting American professor William Quandt, OIC Secretariat officials reiterated previous calls for strengthened ties with the US government (refs A,B), including appointment of a new US special envoy. OIC officials said they want to see the United States become more involved in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and proposed the Syrian track as the best avenue for success. Roundtable discussion framed context for request from OIC SYG Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu to meet POTUS in Turkey. END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (C) QUANDT VISIT: On March 2 OIC officials hosted a roundtable for visiting professor (US Speaker) William Quandt, well-known author and Middle East commentator, University of Virginia professor, and former NSC staffer. Quandt spoke to several audiences in Jeddah, principally about the issues of US and Iran, Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

[3](#). (C) ISRAEL/PALESTINE: Ambassador Mahdi Fathalla (former Egyptian diplomat), OIC Director for Political Affairs, called for additional US effort to produce a breakthrough on the Israel-Palestine front. He described the Saudi-initiated Arab peace proposal as a good starting point: "This is a missed opportunity by the Israelis and the Americans since they are playing it together. We know this and everybody knows this. We are ready and the Arab initiative is on the table, despite some Arab countries wanting to withdraw the offer. There is an opportunity for reconciliation."

[4](#). (C) SYRIA: Ufuk Gokcen (Turkish diplomat), advisor to the Secretary General, opined that Israeli-Arab peace-making efforts should focus on Syria: "It is very nave to ignore the Syrian track. Syrian society is ready for peace. Solving this issue will involve compromise for the Israelis, which will make it easier for them to compromise on the Palestinian issue."

[5](#). (C) IRAN AND IRAQ: Other OIC views were the familiar refrains. According to Fathalla, the Washington approach on the Iran issue is "a pretext -- as in Iraq." Without elaboration, he indicated that claims regarding Iran's nuclear intentions are being used, by the US, "for political purposes." Noting the recent trip of the OIC Secretary General to Iraq, the first for SYG Ihsanoglu and the fourth high level OIC delegation to visit Iraq, Fathalla said the purpose was to learn from the Iraqis what the OIC can do to assist. He claimed the OIC has played a positive role in defusing tensions between Shi'a and Sunni, citing OIC's success in bringing 30 scholars from both branches of Islam to Mecca for intra-faith dialogue.

[6](#). (C) SPECIAL ENVOY POSITION: OIC officials continue to stress interest in renewing the position of the US special envoy to the OIC. Fathalla said the OIC wishes to further

official contact with the USG through any and all available channels, while urging the US "to take advantage of the OIC itself" as a channel to the Muslim world: "The right channel is the OIC; we can represent the many causes of the Islamic World. We can be the proper channel for the new vision of the new administration." Another OIC official expressed the hope that "President Obama will fulfill his campaign promise of holding a US-Islamic summit." OIC officials urged stronger ties with the United States through unofficial contacts with media, NGOs, and think tanks as a means of influencing American public opinion and correcting chronic misperceptions of Muslims and Islam.

17. (C) POST COMMENT: OIC officials, several of whom are retired member state diplomats, tend to inflate the importance of the OIC role in regional matters, particularly with regard to its impact in reducing sectarian strife in Iraq. While the organization may not have the commanding influence in the Islamic world that its officials purport, the OIC is a broad-based, generally moderate political body with links to 57 Muslim member countries. Its leadership has aggressively been courting strengthened ties with the USG since the November election, including the appointment of a new special envoy. Clearly, the OIC is seeking high level US interaction in order to validate and legitimize its role as a non-religious Muslim organization positioned to engage the USG -- the latest being the March 24 request from OIC SYG Ihsanoglu, passed to IO/UNP, to meet POTUS in Istanbul or Ankara. END COMMENT.

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